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1 Untimeliness, Recognition and Respect in the Work of Gonçalo Tavares[1]

The concept of untimeliness, more specifically when what happens seems to have arrived "late", is of interest to me as a self-reflexive form and a manifestation of what can be seen as literary circulation. I will take this concept and work with it, in a broad sense, based on the principle that it concerns not only the material circulation of works, once they have been published, but also the circulation of the thematic and formal material that they are composed of. I am thus interested in looking at the work that I will analyse here in greater depth, *Uma Menina está perdida no seu Século à procura do Pai* (A Girl is Lost in her Century in Search of her Father) by Gonçalo M. Tavares, as a decisive example of the way in which the re-use of thematic and formal elements, and in particular the crystallization of mismatches between history and literature, can be the focus of novelistic analysis itself. The hypothesis that is my point of departure, then, is that within modes of literary circulation there are some that underline such mismatches, thus revealing the temporal and historical faults that literature is also made of. In reality, the distancing itself between historical event and literary phenomenon, between history and literature, and the way in which it is used as a literary procedure, may prove to be a paradigm for what voluntarily *presents itself* as if it were untimely, and as if that untimeliness illustrated a specific mode of literary circulation, and more broadly, of cultural circulation. It is a specifically literary proposal and an instance of self-reflexivity that are thus at stake here.

1 A very early version of this work was published in the journal *DEARQ*, in Bogota (Colombia), in 2016.

The concept of untimeliness, in its "late" mode (because it can also occur in its "early" variety), does not in reality represent a true and innocent delay. The latter implies that things *should* arrive at a certain moment and were delayed, thus only managing to do so later. The emphasis here is placed on the moment of arrival. The concept of untimeliness, however, implies that things that happen do so "out of time", that they circulated in a historically complex way and arrived at a moment that illustrates a historical mismatch between their happening and their arrival. The emphasis is here placed not only on the moment of arrival, but also, and perhaps chiefly, on the process that made them arrive so late (or so early).

This process poses what we could call hermeneutic challenges, given that it is necessary to take into account these aforementioned mismatches, which means maintaining two historical focal points permanently in view and in contact.

In some instances, it is not only a case of having missed the right moment to arrive (although it can also be this, as we have seen), but rather of demonstrating the lack of synchrony between historical time and the time of human events and actions, which can be untimely for the simple reason that one aspect of historicity is its *anachronistic* nature, which suddenly leads us to reflect on the lack of the incongruous nature of a given action at a given moment.

This untimeliness also relates to literature and literary circulation, for example on each occasion that "going backwards" is transformed into a way of "going forwards". One of the examples (far from the only one) which we should seriously consider is the way that the idea of the *rear-guard* permeates the notion of the *vanguard* and combines with it in the conception of various aspects of modernisms – from the attraction of Primitivism to that of Classicism, in times that would not seem to be particularly productive. In this respect I have studied the case of Ricardo Reis, the anachronistic heteronym of Fernando Pessoa (2013: 75–85). But obviously the case of Oswald de Andrade immediately also comes to mind, and his concept of cultural cannibalism (a literal case of going backwards in order to go forwards) – another example of a vanguard that is created with and from seemingly untimely, "late in arriving" rear-guard material. With regard to French authors, Claudel, with his re-invention of the biblical distich, and

the anachronistic Péguy maintained the same type of complex approach to historical time: as Walter Benjamin said, "brush history against the grain" (2003: 389–400). This "brushing" is also a form of literary circulation, and it is this notion that I intend to develop in this chapter.

In reality, from this perspective it can be stated that literary circulation is a field in which the phenomenon of untimeliness becomes more evident and, therefore, gains greater weight. In some way it seems to become clear that, at least in terms of the tradition of literary phenomena, it is untimeliness that characterizes circulation, not the supposed simultaneity between two or more occurrences of the same phenomenon or of the same set of similar phenomena.

All of the above is of relevance to the work of the Portuguese novelist Gonçalo M. Tavares. I will aim to analyse the way in which the pasts that he brings to light reveal, in terms of thematic and even formal materiality, a significant untimeliness that is not just verbalized, but, moreover, is made apparent. It is not just a question of materials circulating, but of these materials circulating with a peculiar delay, thus revealing their anachronistic nature. Such an anachronism is a form of historicity and, more especially, a way of speeding up the past in the direction of the present, making it circulate in an often unexpected and even surprising way. My proposition with regard to Gonçalo M. Tavares is that it is precisely this that occurs in his work.

Let us begin at the beginning (one of the possible beginnings), presenting the hypothesis that the work of Tavares results from a specific concern with a certain notion of cosmopolitanism deeply implicated in reflections on human *rights* and, even, on the very notion of *humanity*. However, it is a question of taking a revisionist look at the concept of cosmopolitanism from the present time, "our century" (the twenty-first century), a term that in this particular case becomes, as we shall see, highly eloquent. This means that we have to retroactively apply to the concept of cosmopolitanism, with its Enlightenment roots, all that today represents the way of "brushing history against the grain". To put it another way, it is not possible to reclaim this concept without also collecting the sediment of what has since passed through it, and without being concerned with showing not only the origins of this notion but also the way in which history has installed

itself and developed within it. It is thus a question of clearly illustrating the way in which the literary circulation of the concept of cosmopolitanism reaches the present and can give rise to untimely literary representations as, I contend, is the case in several novels by Gonçalo M. Tavares.

Will such untimeliness imply a "delay" that is historically incompatible with the present, and the imprisonment of literary reflection in a time that is no longer its own?

To answer this question it is appropriate to introduce another set of issues. It is the case that historical evolution and literary circulation are made up of, not only different kinds of links, but also differentiated temporal speeds. In this regard Claudio Guillén has expressed ideas of great interest, when thinking about the relevance of the heterogeneity of different historical durations, conceptualized in the context of the *Nouvelle Histoire*, for putting literature and the (equally historical) phenomena that constitute it into perspective (1978: 533–549). Guillén draws attention to the way that equating *long, medium and short durations* can, effectively, offer an interesting framework within which to think about the problem of the supposed "universals" of literature. We could, instead of resorting to potentially totalizing (and thus a-historical) concepts, such as that of "universal", insist on the recognition of categories that move extremely slowly and thus demand an extremely wide historical lens so that their dynamism can be recognized. The example that Guillén gives of these long literary durations is that of modes (lyric, epic-narrative and dramatic) that, he argues, would benefit from being recognized not as literary invariables but as categories of long and persistent duration, whose variation has to be equated in a totally different way to other types of literary phenomena imbued with faster and more prompt historical speeds. In the category of medium durations Guillén chooses to situate reflections on literary periods that, being able to encompass significant temporal expanses, thus demonstrate a quicker internal dynamism and, therefore, one that is more likely to be immediately perceived. This is the case, in his view, of periods such as Classicism and Romanticism. Finally, there are, according to Guillén, phenomena of short duration, like, for example, the above-mentioned vanguards, in which historical speed accelerates and dynamism becomes a fundamental vector. In these moments of accelerated time and of greater

concentration, historical changes, he argues, become more visible and agitated (but this does not mean that it is only at these times that changes take place, as in fact we have seen above).

Claudio Guillén adds to these three durations a fourth form of historical speed, which he borrows from the art historian George Kubler and which he considers specific to cultural objects and procedures. This fourth notion is worthy of our special attention. It concerns *intermittent durations*. Guillén argues that there are cultural phenomena, in this case of a literary nature, which are imbued with a duration that is not expressed via a longer or shorter temporal expanse, but rather via its ability to occur in different historical contexts, and thus to be repeated differently. Its *capacity for intermittence* thus becomes a historical fact that implies a special form of historicity: of interest is not only what a phenomenon is, but also the way it relates to other historical occurrences, and therefore the links it maintains with the latter. We have already seen, furthermore, that these links can oscillate between different combinations, whether moving in the direction of the pole of continuity or that of rupture. All this signifies that, in the context of literary objects, a historical phenomenon also entails the relationships *between* objects, and not only each one of them considered in isolation. Guillén gives the example of the pastoral genre, or that of the historical novel. The potential for re-emergence that these genres evidence, and that is also their potential for re-invention, relates to a peculiar form of historical duration of literary phenomena: their intermittence. All this also signifies something else, which I would like to underline here, due to the consequences it has as regards the historical nature of literature: it is that we can never consider a literary (or cultural) phenomenon as definitively confined to the past, because via its intermittence it can reappear, repeated and yet new, in a historically unpredictable context. This emergence will affect, indelibly, the past (as well as the present and future) history of this phenomenon. The non-encapsulation of the past in the past is part of the historical nature of literature and, in my view, dictates the ways in which it manifests itself. A single example comes to mind in Portuguese literature, the revival of the epic that, announced as a project by Garcia de Resende in the Prologue to the *Cancioneiro Geral* (The General Book of Songs, 1516), and already hesitantly enacted in this collection, re-appeared over

and over again in the centuries that followed, in all of them, furthermore, as an autonomous project, attempt or gesture, in order to find its maximum expression in *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusiads*, 1572), and has accompanied us to the present day, until the recent *Viagem à Índia* (*Voyage to India*, 2010) by Gonçalo M. Tavares.

This example can help us to understand what happens, within this author's universe, regarding the above-mentioned concept of cosmopolitanism, examining it through this revisionist lens that considers it to be an untimely case of literary circulation. This will thus be my next step.

In order to do so, I will revisit some of the fundamentals of the question that I am going to explore in greater depth. In fact, the German thinker Aleida Assmann recently returned, in the context of her prolonged interest in memory studies (which are a form of humanly filtered historical time), a field that has constituted one of the most interesting areas of debate over the last decade, to thinking about the concepts of *recognition* and *respect* as being part of the process that she refers to as "civilizing societies" (2013: 69–91). The Enlightenment origins of both concepts (and, furthermore, of cosmopolitanism), as they are understood in the modern world, lead her to re-think the way in which they are transformed in global society today: from being concepts that, theoretically, lead to a neutralization of cultural differences, they have become "new transcultural candidates for our post-ideological age" (2013: 69). In addition she conceives of "the anthropological concept of recognition as a vital resource for individual and collective identity constructions" (2013: 69), a view that I share.

The way in which Assmann poses the problem is thus, in itself, already a defining feature of the movement of cultural and literary circulation: the concepts that she analyses have recognizable historical roots, but the way they circulate transforms them, sometimes ironically, as in the case that she cites. Literary circulation can thus *deform* concepts and issues, leading to a *loss* of their functionality, or even to their ironic degradation. However, it is also true, in Assmann's view, that the coming into play of different contexts and interferences can, equally, lead to substantial alterations that can have powerful and unexpectedly consolidated repercussions. It seems to be that this is the case of the work of Gonçalo M. Tavares.

Thus, to some of the ambiguities that the concept of *recognition*, both individual and collective, implies, Assmann responds with the concept of *respect*, which she subdivides into five different types. One of these is cultural respect, which presupposes the recognition of the individual and communitarian differences of civilizational processes, and this is the starting point for my considerations.

In reality, it is from this type of respect, and from another form that stems from it, and which I will refer to later, that Gonçalo Tavares's projects derive, from *Jerusalém* (Jerusalem) to *Viagem à Índia* (*Voyage to India*), from *Aprendendo a Rezar na Era da Técnica* (Learning to Pray in the Era of Technique) to *Uma Menina está perdida no seu Século à Procura do Pai* (A Girl is Lost in her Century in Search of her Father), the latter a novel published at the end of 2014, and that constitutes the focus of my analysis in this chapter. In all these novels Tavares creates stories that, ultimately, point above all to the *opacity* of the narrative, of the characters and of their past, the way in which they all derive from a concept of history incapable of shedding light on outsiders, specifically, or even of really taking them into consideration. We will see that this approach implies that the action takes place in urban spaces that already have very little to do with the bourgeois city or the *flâneur* of Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. On the contrary, we encounter what we could call an *alternative city* – and alternative from various perspectives. This alternative city is labyrinthine and apparently meaningless, as we shall see. Although it is traversed by the protagonists' wanderings, the latter do not make it less opaque and in some way, distant. From the Baudelairean city we re-encounter the roaming of the streets and the occurrence of unexpected and flash episodes, so to speak. We also re-encounter a way of conceiving of its population as heterogeneous and cosmopolitan. However, this heterogeneity and this cosmopolitanism are, in every respect, simultaneously the heirs to and yet different from their Enlightenment forbears. What the latter clarified, the others obscure. What the latter organized, the others disorganize. What the latter gave meaning to, the others obfuscate to the point of us grasping that the basis of the construction of meaning is, after all, non-sense. Literary circulation takes place thus in the sense of a process of degradation.

Nevertheless, this degradation introduces into the literary fabric of the Portuguese novel, via an unexpected movement of circulation, a set of topics and obsessions that today could seem totally anachronistic to us: after all, almost a century has gone by since the terrible upheavals which Nazism and its avatars plunged Europe and the wider world into. What is the meaning, therefore, of the untimely emergence of a novelistic work (and, in particular but by no means exclusively the novel I am dealing with in this chapter) that takes up again, in the Portuguese literary field, the vast subject matter and the heavy memory of the Holocaust? Especially when we bear in mind that Portugal was, during the Second World War, a cautiously neutral country? And even more so if we take into account that such memory and such circulation had never, until now, had a structured and systematic impact on Portuguese literature, beyond topical representations without particular impact? Why is it that only in the twenty-first century does it seem that Portugal has opened itself up systematically to the representation of the memory of the Holocaust, a historical issue that appeared to belong to others and to be anachronistic in relation to our present? It is precisely a case of untimely and "delayed" literary circulation, in which the literary material arrives late. But, when it does arrive, it is already structured and its opacity is virtually insurmountable. In Gonçalo M. Tavares, it should be said, it is this opacity that best illustrates the slow manner in which the memory of the Holocaust has finally arrived in Portuguese literature – from the evil experiments led by Hitler's doctors to the journeys of nameless refugees, who invaded the whole of Europe.

We must also understand that the entire work of Gonçalo Tavares, but in particular the work that I am focusing on here, demonstrates a way of giving a voice to a demand and to the establishment of an argument: cultural respect, as analysed by Aleida Assmann, is one of the privileged ways of "giving attention" to those who are not socially recognized and, thus, respected. It is the "recognition of differences", to use Assmann's apt expression, which is thus mobilized in order to deal with an *alternative city*, a *polis* where the *barbaroi*, foreigners, non-conformists, perhaps in spite of everything can find their place in the world. In the case of the novel, *Uma Menina está perdida no seu Século à Procura do Pai*, we end up not finding the father that the protagonist Hanna, the fourteen-year-old girl

with Down's syndrome, is searching for. We do not even know if one day he will be found, and if the past can be re-written with him. But it is in these opaque cities that the characters move around and wander, most of the time without us knowing where they came from, why they are on the move, how they do so, and with what purpose. Therefore all the characters, on the one hand, participate in this opacity, and on the other, all of them, without exception, carry the *secret* of their history and, consequently, the *secret* of their meaning – secrets that the reader will not succeed in discovering. The alternative city of our contemporary world is no longer the one where stratifications were to a large extent invisible – it is the one from where all signs of stability seem to have disappeared, but without this having brought about another social and, above all, civil order. This notion of *alternative* therefore coincides with the notion of *untimeliness*. The latter is the condition of the former, so to speak. It is because events arrive out of time and are, for that reason, hard to understand, or carry with them a certain measure of historical incomprehensibility, that we find ourselves confronted by alternative worlds composed by an uneven and thus unpredictable movement of literary circulation. The Second World War and the alternative cities that we traverse, with Hanna and the narrator, in search of a father whose existence is only assumed, are elements that are anachronistic in relation to our apparently post-ideological present. But it is also this that untimely movements lead to: the incongruity of historical times, on the one hand; and the incongruity between them and literary manifestations that, one could say, are already very distant from them.

It is thus not surprising that several of Tavares's narratives, including the novel I am focusing on in this chapter, are set in a time and in one or more cities in which virtually the only point of orientation is that we know that *it comes after* Nazism – a time and a city where awareness of the latter cannot thus cease to exist.

This awareness that *it comes after* is one of the clearest pointers to the notion of untimeliness. In fact, each time that the past casts a shadow over the present to the extent that it transforms the latter, as is the case here, what we find is a way of reading (and for this reason I referred above to a hermeneutic challenge) that requires making the past and present converge. We cannot read only from "today" (although we always do): we also have

to recognize that we are being presented with another way of reading that, via an awareness of the untimely nature of literary material, identifies the latter as having arrived out of its time. Reading at the point at which "past" and "present" come together, reading with the understanding that only literary circulation can allow them to converge and yet remain differentiated, becomes in this way a hermeneutic challenge that is, simultaneously, a historical challenge.

This same historical recognition affects all the characters, in one way or another, and finds its most profound and paradigmatic form in the figure of a young girl with Down's syndrome, who is looking for a father who perhaps never even existed as such in her past. The truth, however, is that she finds this very father symbolically configured in the figure of the narrator and of the secrets that also lead him to flee without explanation. Thus, Hanna's abandonment and isolation are paralleled in those of Marius: "his life is a different one, it has nothing to do with that, he has to deal with his own issues – to hide as much as possible, to pay attention to the news, to listen to the radio, to gauge whether he needs to move to another city [...]" (2014: 71). An inexplicable fear? Perhaps. But also perhaps a new occurrence of fear and terror relating to what at any historical moment seems able to provoke a resurgence of Nazism and totalitarian societies associated with the past. We will never know what Marius is afraid of. For what reason could he be forced to flee, to keep looking over his shoulder, to move cities? But do we need to know why? In truth, by recognizing the untimely nature of this fear, which stems from the past, almost one hundred years ago, we are at the same time recognizing that it is always present. It is not only historical occurrences that can repeat themselves (even if in different ways, as Marx noted). Literary occurrences, bringing the rear-guard to the vanguard of the present, can also "brush history against the grain". In doing so, at the same time they illustrate the complex and heterogeneous way that literary circulation manifests itself, as Kubler and Guillén argue, via *intermittent durations*, which are not stable and yet no less significant for that.

The novel in question, like several of those by the same author, furthermore, is thus peopled with figures that, in a literal or figurative sense, are all looking for their father, a search that unfolds throughout the novel.

It is not just Hanna, but also Marius, via allusions and metaphors; Agam Josh, the red-eyed man, whose father was killed in the war; Terezin and his visits to the large abandoned archive, where he goes to research "his family, his origins" (2014: 145); or Vitrius and his files, a legacy from his father, his grandfather and his great-grandfather, overflowing files, full of notes and endless numbers. Numbers, files, archives: all these are references to material records of what precisely can be put into circulation, enabling memory, even if it is untimely. Anxiety in relation to what cannot be deciphered, to the books that cannot be read, to the information that cannot be recovered, thus permeates this novel in an equally obsessive way: after all, what arrives out of time brings with it something that is more important – the act of arriving itself. Everything that is lost (and in this novel a great deal is also lost), furthermore, will never arrive. We must now focus a little on the effects that the disappearance, whether total or partial, of literary material has in terms of its circulation and, therefore, the creation and consolidation of patrimony.

In reality, and in a wider sense, it is possible to say that this novel thematizes, via this set of issues, another central aspect of ideas about literary circulation: the issue of loss, whether provisional (like the work of Lucretius, which in fact remained lost until the early fifteenth century) or definitive (the second book, about comedy, of Aristotle's *Poetics*), of texts that constitute literary patrimony.

This loss has decisive effects in terms of what is of concern here, which we can express as follows: *literary circulation is made up of not only what manifestly circulates, but also what circulates deficiently or, even, what is prevented (for diverse reasons) from circulating*. We could add that, with regard to these latter cases, and as is obvious, our cultural memory is also very fragmentary: we may know that there were books that were lost and re-appeared, partially or entirely, at a given moment (Lucretius); we may have an expressive memory of what is known to have existed but has apparently disappeared (Aristotle's book about comedy, referred to by the author himself in his *Rhetoric*, and of which we know for certain that a ninth-century Syriac Aramaic translation existed); but there is an undetermined and extremely significant body of works whose existence, and thus whose potential circulation, is totally unknown to us, or is known to us without us

being able to decipher it (the case of the literature of Ancient Egypt, whose hieroglyphics were not deciphered until the early nineteenth century).

This allows us to express a second decisive point: *literary circulation is also made up of what we can only indicially reconstruct, like the aforementioned works, and even others that we can only assume existed*. By taking this aspect into consideration we acquire a complex vision of what literary circulation can be. In fact, if we are unable to know what type of circulation works had whose existence we are totally unaware of, in the case of others, like the aforementioned works by Aristotle and Lucretius, we have access to interesting information, albeit fragmentary and discontinuous, which allows us to reconstruct at least some episodes of its circulation. Such is the case, for example, of Stephen Greenblatt's work about Lucretius, entitled *The Swerve*, which traces the complex journey of his work *De Rerum Natura* from the time it was written in the first century B. C. to it subsequent disappearance, several centuries later, and up until its re-discovery in a monastery in Central Europe by the humanist Poggio Bracciolini, in the early fifteenth century. This is a particularly rich example, since Greenblatt dates the history of modern materialism, from the Renaissance onwards, from the reading, translation and circulation that this work by Lucretius gave rise to, once it had been found.

How many works or texts had a different fate, circulating at a given time and then vanishing? How many others did not leave behind even a memory of their titles or authors? This is an area that clearly complicates the nature of literary circulation. Furthermore, it is an aspect that Gonçalo M. Tavares's novel explicitly raises: it is a question of also reflecting on textual precariousness (resulting from the material dimension of texts) and on the precariousness of their circulation. It is thus no coincidence that so many characters in this novel find themselves anxiously absorbed in deciphering and preserving texts and, through them, the memory that they activate. It is a question that, once again, is relevant for the thematic material that the novel is composed of, as well as for the theoretical problems of preservation and forgetting which any kind of cultural circulation is bound up with and, to a great extent, depends on.

After all, this is also one of the central meanings implied by the literary *topos* of the search for the father, a *topos* that is one of the best examples

of literary material "in circulation" since ancient times. The search for the father is of the same nature as textual preservation and the ability to make some kind of cultural memory endure. In both cases, in this novel, we are dealing preferably with the aspect of loss, more than with the aspect of recovery. In reality, not even the father will eventually be found, nor will the files, numbers, archives, however well preserved they may be, be able to contain everything that their custodians hope to conserve within them for future memory. There is, thus, a girl who is searching for her father, and who will end up only being able to find him within that symbiosis, recognized by Assmann, between recognition and respect that, in the end, bestow the right to belong in a city within his and our contemporary history.

So what does it mean to arrive after, to live after Nazism, after the extermination that the latter represents? We know that this is a question that has been posed on various occasions, and that various answers (furthermore even contradictory ones) ultimately can never provide a definitive response. But it is one of the central questions, not just of this novel by Tavares, but also of a collection of fictional texts from his wider oeuvre. This aspect raises another question: what is the meaning, virtually a century later, of constructing in Portugal the most consolidated and complex set of reflections about Nazism and the Holocaust? Perhaps the answer to these questions could be linked, precisely, to Assmann's concepts of recognition and respect. Let us pause to consider this idea.

"Cultural respect is claimed by those who have recovered their collective culture, history, and identity after long periods of misrecognition and disrespect", Assmann writes (2013: 86). Only this cultural respect can later lead, in her understanding, to the anthropologically more profound form of respect, which she terms "civil respect". Here it is no longer just a question of asserting and accepting cultural differences, but of recognizing that they must not lead, at the risk of being effectively neutralized, to the ghetto of incommunicability, which merely reaffirms the closing off of different groups who recognize themselves as culturally and civilly different. On the contrary, Assmann reminds us, civil respect lies in the "rediscovery of similarities" (2013: 87) that do not cancel out recognized differences, but rather give them a more complex form whose response leads us to a modern concept of "civility", which includes Enlightenment principles

but embraces more than just that. Therefore, whereas "culture" refers, in Assmann's essay, above all to the recognition of group differences (ethnic, racial, religious, class-based and so on), the concept of "civility" emerges as that which, even if precariously, permits and enhances the recognition of civil similarities that do not cancel out differences but make dialogue between them possible.

What occurs in Tavares's novel can be aptly described via this shift from culture to civility: not a single character, of the various ones that cross paths in the novel, always in an unplanned and unexpected way, corresponds to the traditional character model. Each one demonstrates a difference that, in reality, only in Hanna's case has an explanation, namely the fact that she has Down's syndrome. The divergences of all the characters, in relation to a putative character model or even to each other, in the universe of the novel, cannot be neutralized, and it is on them, furthermore, that the existence of something resembling a community depends. This description enables us to underline a decisive aspect: if all the characters are, effectively, different from each other, in reality it is these differences that constitute the specific link that gregariously makes them an example of community. The civil similarities that they demonstrate are, in this way, one of the essential aspects of their characterization – above all in a novel where it is a question of reflecting on the catalogue of extirpations of this civility, conceived of and carried out by the theory and practice of Nazism.

It is therefore no surprise that, in this novel, we find ourselves faced with a representation of the city as a space that is simultaneously human, physical and symbolic: because this city is the place where those who are different cross paths but also, and in spite of everything, the place where those who are different can talk amongst themselves.

From the human point of view, the characters that move around and cross paths in the city (in a way that only urban space permits) belong, in their entirety, to a place built on top of their *mis*recognition). Anonymities, secrets that are alluded to and never explained, silences that prevent a full understanding of what has happened: the characters belong to the alternative city of contemporary times, in which the different and the heterogeneous cross paths, and where there seems to be, at least apparently, difficulty in communicating, whatever the reason may be.

The physical city is also an alternative one: it is made up of anonymous spaces, like railways stations (an example of a non-place, to draw on Marc Augé's classic definition); of alleys and side streets, even of main streets where anonymity persists; of nameless hotels in which each room, instead of a number, bears the name of a Nazi concentration camp, Auschwitz (where Marius and Hanna sleep), Treblinka, Dachau, Mauthausen-Gusen; and of labyrinth-hotels, in which the characters lose their way, without light and without direction.

Finally, the symbolic city is still an alternative one: the one from which cannot be eradicated the weight of history or, in particular, the way in which the twentieth century shook to its foundations and destroyed, like an earthquake, as the philosopher Susan Neiman writes, the apparently stable bourgeois city that the nineteenth century had erected. It is a city made up of erosions and ruins, not just a built environment.

But this awareness of the various dimensions of its alternative nature, outlined in this novel, creates, furthermore, significant narrative effects. In fact if we accept, following Margaret Somers's lead, that "social life is itself *storied* and (...) narrative is an *ontological condition of social life*" (2013: 50), we will also be likely to understand both the alternative nature of the city that I referred to above, and the search for the father and for one's origins that, in one way or another, this leads everyone to: it is a question with an ontological basis, in which the nature of what is narrated signals the simultaneously individual (of the characters) and social (of the world in which they circulate) condition. This question also helps us to understand the nature, both concrete and allegorical, of the fables that constitute Gonçalo M. Tavares's narrative, of which this novel is an excellent example. I am referring here to the profound *opacity* that shrouds the characters, spaces and histories in the novel. This opacity is allegorically represented by all the unexplained (and inexplicable) aspects of the novel. The world (the city) in which the characters move around is difficult to recognize because it is an alternative world (city), that underworld that contemporaneously, in some way, one hopes does not want to be recognized.

What unites us, as readers, in relation to the characters is the certainty that this allegory, unlike medieval allegories, does not transport us to the world of what was previously explained, and is explained to us again now.

On the contrary, it is an allegory that ontologically signals the opaque depths of what contemporaneously we cannot and do not know how to explain. A kind of allegory of evil, in the sense that Neiman philosophically uses the concept of evil: that which determines, on the one hand, the impossible confrontation between man and the limits of the human condition; and, on the other, the questioning of the place of this evil in a world that God has withdrawn from. Consequently, and recalling the words of Voltaire, not everything is well, not everything is the best of possible worlds, as Leibniz and Alexander Pope desired. The memory of the Holocaust and of the Jews to be found in the underworld of this novel represents the permanence of evil in the contemporary city, which is always the city that came after what Nazism invented. The allegory of evil supports, thus, this opaque narrative: what creates the photograph of Goering, an enormous photograph measuring 10m x 6m, positioned above a building? "Who had put it there? How had they given authorization for it"? (Tavares 2014: 122). Or the figure that answers him, Moebius, whose back is entirely covered by a tattoo of a single word, "Jew", in a multitude of languages: "a dictionary of all the languages of the world, but a dictionary of a single word (...), a dictionary that was still, simultaneously, an anatomical and a geographical map" (2014: 115). In truth, nothing is explained to us – perhaps because there are no explanations.

Perhaps this is ultimately the reason for the re-writing and the obsessive presence of this literary material in the twenty-first century, in Portuguese literature, throughout Tavares's oeuvre. Just as the fragmentary and precarious nature of circulating literary material is, as we have seen, central to its conception, equally the opacity inherent in all the instances and all the representations of inexplicability in the novel must, in my view, converge in the notion of literary circulation, underlining that the latter is also made of what is impossible, in some case, to determine. Where these characters come from and the identity, in effect, of these cities from which the novel is constructed, become questions whose probable non-existent answer illuminates, yet again, the way in which literary and cultural material can circulate *in an allusive way*. It is not a case, thus, only of detecting positive sociological and historically demarcated movements – although it is a question, also, in several cases, of precisely this. We can therefore talk about

another form of literary circulation, which, as in the novel in question, is achieved via allusions, hermeneutically ambiguous movements, opacities and multiple possibilities. This is the case of the literary material relating to Nazism and the Holocaust to be found in Gonçalo M. Tavares's novels.

It is also for this reason that we are not referring here to the positivist realm of influences, not even that of reception in the strict sense of the term. Both of these areas concern positively determined or sociologically determinable examples. But the literary circulation that I have aimed to illustrate in this chapter, the kind that is characterized in particular by the way in which the literary, thematic and formal material circulates, is not, in many cases, made up of *episodes* that in themselves have meaning. The literary circulation of the subject of, and the motives underling Nazism and death camps consolidates the notion that the inexplicable nature of evil (and therefore, to a large extent, of the narrative that aims to recount it) can pass, with visible temporal leaps (Guillén's intermittent durations), from one piece of literature to another, from one century to another, without there being an objective explanation for why this occurs. Perhaps the absence of an explanation stems precisely from the inexplicable nature of this modern evil, of which Nazism constitutes a terrible paradigm.

Another question in the novel relates to the location of the story and which places the characters therefore circulate in and also make us, the readers, symbolically circulate in. It is fitting to ask: Where exactly, then, does the story take place? The names are Germanic, in virtually every case – which represents the confirmation of the entrance of the cosmopolitan universe within Portuguese literature: in fact, the narrated events and the names of the characters illustrate above all what appears to be "foreign", what does not "belong" to the native dimension, what can only be represented precisely because it has "circulated". Hanna identifies her father's city as being "Blim" – could that be Berlin? We do not know, no one in the novel knows for sure. But it is to Berlin that they head, without a definite answer, at least for some of the time. Hanna and Marius go by train. To get there they go down a dark alley, where a man is putting up posters, surprising posters, on a wall. His name is Fried Stamm. What are the five brothers of the family intending, in reality, by sticking up posters around all the cities of Europe? "We are trying in part to remember what happened

and what is happening on the other side; arousing memory, sometimes it is also that – showing what is happening on the side we cannot see" (2014: 28). A recognition strategy, then, as Assmann would say. And the awareness that extermination can take various forms, emerging in historically differentiated situations. We can refer to the memory of this equally as literary circulation.

So what does happen in this novel? Merely fleeting events, brief, unexpected and surprising encounters. Nothing prepares them, virtually nothing happens to them in the story – and city, characters and novel all appear to drift along in a sea of debris in which, paradoxically, the only buoy seems to be Hanna, the young girl with Down's syndrome, who is searching for her father, lost in her century.

Like her, they are all wandering, disorientated (to use a word from the novel), through a city that nothing enables us to construct visually, only a main street, small side streets, a café, a building in ruins, a giant photograph, a nameless hotel. There is not a single shred of visible architecture, no visual relationship in a tangled maze that is, above all, about moving around. Just one: "(...) houses, then, incomprehensible, houses that are not understood as houses because they cannot be rebuilt" (2014: 53). What is an incomprehensible house, and a city composed of incomprehensible houses? What kind of humanity inhabits such a city and such a world?

In Berlin, in the end, a girl with Down's syndrome and her mentor, Marius, wander aimlessly, without direction. As if both were penetrating a Dantesque *dark jungle*, where, though, there are no perfect circles, only different ways of losing and searching. Throughout the novel a "civil respect" has been created, however, and it is this that unites Hanna and Marius. It is also this that brings a smile to the lips of all the passers-by who cross paths with Hanna. This character represents, figuratively, all the alternative existences and differences that cross paths in the city, of which having Down's syndrome and being a Jew in Berlin, beneath a portrait of Goering, are the most visible signs.

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